

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for February 7, 2001

Agenda Items

- Briefing on Canopy Coverage
- Update on Trees on Platforms request
- Design Development Briefing on Othello and Henderson Stations (Sound Transit)

Commissioners Present

Rick Sundberg, Chair
Carolyn Law
Jay Lazerwitz
Don Royse

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
John Walser, Sound Transit
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign

The meeting began with Panel review of the action on the Edmunds station from the January 31, 2001 meeting. Rick requested that the consultants return to present a revised 60% design to LRRP prior to 90% design. He added that the Panel would like to see elevations and/or perspective drawings of the elements to be located on the platform, in order to better understand the visual organization and appearance of the station. He noted that while the Panel knows where the various elements are sited, they have yet to see a comprehensive drawing showing what the elements look like individually and collectively.

Cheryl provided updates to the Panel on various items: the Southeast Seattle Link Station Design Guidelines, noting they have been published with a comment period ending Friday, March 2nd; the Edmunds street redesign, noting the community meeting was inconclusive but with a small majority favoring the "close Edmunds" design alternative; and the LRRP schedule of meetings. After some discussion, the Panel decided they prefer fewer, longer meetings to more, shorter meetings, and especially requested that Sound Transit wait until work is adequately developed before bringing it to the Panel for review, stating that this is more efficient and cost-effective for all concerned. They asked staff to consolidate agenda items where possible, to begin meetings at 3:30 pm, and to conduct as much "business" outside of meetings as possible to make the best use of time in meetings. Rick noted that there is much more to cover in design development briefings and that ideally the Panel would review just one station per meeting (allowing a full two hours for each).

Cheryl introduced Katherine Claeys who will be taking Phil Harrison's place as the lead Sound Transit coordinator for the City.

Rick shared some drawings with Sound Transit of another transportation project in Holland that show the design comprehensively, and suggested that Sound Transit try to provide the same level of detail for 60% design of Link stations in future presentations. He emphasized that he is not talking about the design of the platform shown in the drawings, but in the clarity with which the drawing shows all station elements and their relationship to one another.

Briefing on Canopy Coverage

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit

Debora provided drawings illustrating the peak time period patronage for each station, and how that patronage number correlates with canopy coverage. She said this information was prepared

in response to a question from the Panel at an earlier meeting. Although the patronage projections are different at each station, the general standard of 30% canopy coverage provides more than enough to handle most peak loads. At Royal Brougham the average coverage needed is only 7%, but they are providing 50% for those times when there are big crowds associated with stadium events.

The ridership numbers are converted into 15-minute calculations of number of people, including those waiting for a train and those departing from a train, during peak three hour periods in 2020. Canopy coverage is based on 7 square feet per person. The Hudson Bergen line in New York averages 4 square feet per person. At the other extreme, Calgary covers 2/3 of the platform, perhaps due to more inclement weather. The drawings use Edmunds station as the sample. We also ran the numbers on an ultimate build-out to Tacoma, Eastside, and Northgate, and still showed fairly low patronage given the frequency of trains running—Edmunds was 41 people boarding and 2 getting off.

Discussion

- It is hard to project that far in advance—I certainly hope these projections are low! I hope we see a lot more ridership than this.
- What are the issues around adding additional canopies later? *(That is our plan—the canopies are modular. Yes, it is a capital cost now, which is why we're stopping at 30% coverage.)*
- Are footings being poured now for these future additional canopies? *(Not necessarily.)*
- It would seem to make sense to pour them now.
- I can only underscore the ability to add canopies over time.
- It looks like we have good coverage to start with.

Briefing on Trees on Platforms Issue

Allen Parker, Sound Transit

The issue of trees on platforms has been with us for awhile. I would like to explain Sound Transit's position, which arises from both Sound Transit and City requirements. In a survey of other systems, we found that most systems do not have trees literally on the platforms, but behind or next to platforms. There is a "dynamic envelope" around the trains themselves that can't be interfered with. We need 9' clear to the underside of the sign. Horizontal dimensions come out of STart, ADA discussions, and architects work for wayfinding and safety. Wayfinding for ADA needs 8'8" clear in front of a pedestrian—this is an emerging concept. Aerial dimensions also figure into this—14' and 8' minimum clearance. In order to maintain trees without powering down the system, the aerial clearance is 14'. Remember we're using 1500 volts versus 750 watts of smaller systems. And the system will be in operation 20 hours a day.

We had detailed conversations with Portland. They have some trees near the trackway, but are finding problems with deciduous trees in that the trackway requires daily cleaning during the fall. This has resulted in extra time and cost to the system. The leaves cause the drains to plug, can be slippery, result in using more sand to reduce slippage and that, in turn, interferes with signal communications, etc. Overexposure to silica has also resulted in employees needing to wear respirator masks. So there are issues with trees on the platform.

We found some areas in the gore zones along MLK that would be suitable for vegetation, but Seatran is not recommending approval of anything but groundcover, citing their potential future

need for the gore zones for turning lanes. No artwork can be sited there either. And the requirement at the street edge is 3' back from the curb along sidewalks.

Discussion

- I understand your concern over leaves and their impact on drainage, but still want to encourage trees wherever there is adequate space to accommodate them. I also don't agree with Seatran that the gore areas should not be planted now, and want to discuss the issue further.
- Where deciduous trees are a problem, why can't we consider evergreen species?
- This is a difficult issue to resolve, in part because overall maintenance of the system isn't entirely worked out yet. We certainly don't want to see the system and its vegetation not maintained.
- What places are left for vegetation if the platforms and gore areas aren't suitable? *(There is space at Lander station behind the eastern platform, but not on the western side.)*
- I agree with Rick regarding Seatran's position on the gore areas. I can't see allowing a bleak environment because of a possible future traffic situation. *(Steve Mah responded that Seatran needs flexibility for a turn pocket in the future. We could consider low groundcover landscaping.)*
- If the turn pocket is more than five years away, I don't think we're justified in prohibiting landscaping.
- Part of the concern along MLK is the number of existing, large-scale trees being removed to put the stations and alignment in. There needs to be some kind of equity between that which is removed and that which is rebuilt.
- We can't solve this problem tonight; let's continue to discuss it.
- If the door is open, there is expertise and creativity to explore it. Are we willing to be a little adventuresome as long as people are charged with solving it? We need some creative examples of how others have handled these issues.
- Please take every opportunity for planting more than groundcover.
- Yes, we understand your concerns and we thank you for this presentation. We'll continue to press for trees wherever possible, however.

Design Development Briefing on the Othello Station

John Walser, Sound Transit

Steve Arai, Arai Jackson

Barbara Alten, Arai Jackson

John Walser opened the presentation with a recap of changes since the last LRRP review:

- Deferral of Graham station
- Change in systems buildings locations
- Final selection of train stopping locations (middle of platform)
- Location of canopies finalized
- Development of a tactile paving pattern for use by visually impaired, ADA compliant signage
- At Henderson, elimination of an off-street bus layover facility; layover is now on-street

Steve Arai continued the presentation, with the following key points:

- Along with Edmunds, these stations are part of a family of stations with related elements, yet each unique and designed to its context.

- The Othello station is a business center, bounded by Othello and Myrtle. Choosing an architectural concept is challenging here since the area is continues to change over time—for now the focus is SE Asian businesses, with an influx of North Africans.
- Key design concern is ensuring that businesses remain visible on both sides of the street.
- We're now integrating the Sasaki work into the design of the station. Don't yet have trees shown.
- Othello is the major through arterial; Myrtle is related more to New Holly traffic, and better suited to bicyclists.

Barbara Alten continued the presentation with a description of the Othello design:

- The architecture is a series of pavilions, derived from the Chinese symbol for home. It is a celebration of earth at the base, and sky with the shelter.
- We need to preserve clear views through the station for the businesses, as Steve mentioned.
- The lantern at the entry is not designed yet, but will be a collaboration between the artist, architect, and landscape architect.
- There is a larger landscape buffer at the entry here than anywhere else.
- The ticket vending machine, phone, and other amenities are location at the entry, after which people move into a "fare paid zone" and walk a short distance to the first pavilion. We're planning to use the ADA "braid" to lead pedestrians to the center doors, and we have other locations open for artwork too.
- The columns will be painted steel, other material include 4' glazing panels, aluminum rafters with translucent glazing, granite low wall, color at ends of the beams and potentially other places.
- Benches will be cantilevered from the wall and made of recycled wood or plastic.
- Windscreen will be clear with painted steel grid on the back for a shoji effect. Colors will be Sound Transit's dark blue and grey for all steel elements, with perhaps another color for aluminum, beams, and downspouts.
- Lighting is metal halide 32' on center to light the pavilions, plus strip fluorescent with spot halide.
- Landscaping is to have an Asian flavor, but suited to the Northwest; grasses, pedestrian-scale, maybe one big tree.
- Brian Goldbloom is the artist; he works in carved granite.

Carol Valenta updated the Panel on the art program saying that the new construction schedule is creating some challenges for integrating artwork into the design. So much will change in 9 years! We feel the best approach is to proceed with maximum flexibility, in order not to impact station architecture and to preserve both budgets. Thus you may see us back away somewhat from full integration of artwork and architecture. We need to create the "dotted line" where we separate the two. This is a real challenge at Othello, although not necessarily the other two stations where art and architecture were less integrated to begin with.

Discussion

- What are all the materials used in the canopy? (We had tile included two weeks ago, but the IDR recommended that we simplify and omit the tile. We are trying to tie into the ticket vending machine, but looking for how to organize it.)
- It would be useful if, in the future, we could hear what the IDR comments are. Can you present them next time? (Yes, we'd like to do that.)
- It is hard to say what an alternative material might be, but they seem too separate now. I'm also not convinced about the ceramic tile band. I suggest you simplify overall.

- The height of the windscreen is functional and gives a sense of enclosure, but what about the 5" tube—is that for signage? (That is structural.) If that is a structural connection, then bring it into the design more; show the connection. I would also suggest the same level of detailing for the lighting. (We're combining metal halide with fluorescent—very different qualities of light, but we're trying to work with the system-wide lighting too.)
- There is a lack of detailing in the lighting that needs to be addressed.
- And the tall light at the end? (To give light in-between the pavilions.)
- Fencing details? (We'd like to use bamboo, but proposing steel piping with a planter on the backside.) The planter is a nice detail.
- I'm wondering about the accent at the end of the curved beam—how does the color occur? Does it wrap around the end or some other means?? (Still to be determined.)
- The granite sample you have is not particularly warm or earthy—consider using another granite or just concrete. (The IDR said to simplify the screen and the stone-face wall; perhaps using the stone as a cap piece but concrete on the rest to save money. We chose this particular granite because it is the type used by the artist.)
- I agree that a handsome stone cap with concrete below is appropriate. The rest of the station is in concrete. (We had another comment about the subtle curve—that it implies a column that isn't really there; that it is a little bit "Hollywood.")
- I have no quarrel with the curve, but I worry about making it too literal. This community will be changing so don't get locked into a strictly Asian theme. Be more rigorous and disciplined with the pieces; simplify the base. I say it is designer's choice regarding stone or concrete, but get more elemental and simpler in your interpretation of the shoji screen. Think simple!
- Let the artist do all the granite pieces.

Action

The Panel thanks the consultants and Sound Transit staff for a thorough presentation, and recommends approval of the design, complimenting consultants on a thoughtful interpretation of an Asian style, without being too literal or cloying. For the next phase of review (90%), the Panel requests additional consideration be given to the Shoji screens, overall lighting, caps, fencing, and landscaping, with an emphasis on getting the most impact for the least cost. The Panel further states that the final design is largely in the details, and suggests further attention to detailing overall with an emphasis on simplification.

Design Development Briefing on the Henderson Station

Steve Arai, Arai Jackson

Ken Kubota, Arai Jackson

Steve Arai summarized the context of the Henderson station with photos, noting this is a transitional area that will take some time to develop. As the first station one sees upon entering Seattle and the last as one leaves, it deserves to have more visual impact. This is a center platform, single-loaded station. Ken Kubota followed with a description of the station architecture:

- The concept started with a look at the neighborhood; the entry (from the south) to the Valley, steep green slopes to the west, reference to the old orchards, and a wind tunnel effect from the wind that runs north along MLK.
- We're creating a presence for the station with tall columns reminiscent of grass or bamboo waving in the wind. Each column is really a bundle of four.
- The system building is at the end—we considered different roof shapes but chose to keep it flat to minimize the structure.

- The canopy is organic; a birdlike form with a structure like a wing. There is a cable to support it, but we made it look like it is floating.
- Interior rings tie the columns into bundles, with drainage down the center. Round rafters, cantilevered glazing/rafters, with system color dark blue in the structural parts.
- Windscreens are placed to screen from the prevailing wind as much as possible, although because of the platform width we are unable to make them very big.
- There are planters, leaning rails, and seating—we'll include more seating as possible.
- Paving is 2' x 2' plus the wayfinding braid.
- A Vietnamese sculptor has been selected who developed a concept of a ribbed, winged creature integrated into the canopy form like a spinnaker or prow of a ship. But now the piece may not be integrated into the architecture, as Carol explained, and so the sculpture might be freestanding.
- Landscaping include street trees and trees on the plaza.

Discussion

- If the cables are taking 15% of the load, and the beams 85%, is there a risk of the canopy becoming airborne? (We've checked this with an engineer and there is no problem.)
- There is a lot of elegance to the form. I have a concern about the relationship of the beam—how it carries the load and how that is also expressed. Make the supporting function more apparent—the beam is doing 85% of the work, so show it! The downspout should be a different color and material. The role of each piece needs to be more clearly defined.
- I have a concern about the light tube.
- I like the integration of strip lights versus spots or pools of light.
- I am uncomfortable with the sculpture as two separate poles; it would be much better mounted on your pylons. Now it looks trapped in those two columns.
- The spinnaker idea is compelling. The integration of art and architecture is really good in this instance—can't we try to make that happen?

At this point, Southeast Seattle resident Shauna Jordan commented that she is concerned about the station design cluttering up an already cluttered skyline (referring to the City Light transmission wires). The Panel responded by saying that it is hard to see without that context represented in the drawings, but that it really is a lovely design that could alter the perception of those lines. There is a very elegant rhythm here, much more compelling than the power grid. Comments continued:

- We really need to see the detailing finished in order to see what the full impact is. The columns do look a little heavy now. (Regarding the detailing, the community commented that the design looked too "cheap" and not traditional or residential enough. So we're looking at using granite tiles. But drainage complicates things too, so we're continuing to explore the use of concrete or more expensive materials.)
- At Othello I suggest touches of granite at the places one would touch or sit upon. It is good when people can touch architecture and leave a mark, because it makes it a beautiful, personal statement. This (Henderson) is an elegant design that doesn't look inexpensive to my mind. Focus on the details. I think the design could really mitigate the power lines.
- The cable is very lyrical, dynamic, and intriguing to see because it isn't used that often.
- Let's see more detail on the ticket vending machines, windscreens, etc.
- Yes, make the screens as inventive as the structure. (It has to be modular, so we're wrestling with how to make it unique.)
- Thank you for providing the art program comments. I'm seduced by the early art proposals but would like to see the artist engaged enough to flesh out all opportunities. Take art to the

same percentage of completion, knowing that technology and circumstances will change over the next few years. We like this work, but specifying it now is tricky.

- Are the plazas going to be art as an object or a landscape?

Action

The Panel thanks the consultants and Sound Transit staff for a thorough presentation, and recommends approval of the design with special appreciation for the "butterfly" structure. For the next phase of design (90%), the Panel requests further refinement of:

- *the steel structure and how the beam expresses the weight it is carrying;*
- *the glazing overall;*
- *all station amenities including ticket vending machines, planters, benches, etc.; and*
- *all materials, using each to its best advantage, with simple straightforward detailing.*

Recognizing the challenge presented by Sound Transit's new construction schedule, the Panel nonetheless recommends integration of the Henderson artwork as much as possible, suggesting the possibility of placing an artwork in that part of the structure now versus a future artwork standing on two separate poles.

The meeting adjourned at 6:10 pm.